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THE HOUSEHOLD ARTS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

THE introduction of a new subject into the curriculum must necessarily call forth questions as to its desirability, and perhaps engender marked opposition from those who believe that the curriculum is already overcrowded, and that there is a tendency toward fads in our school system. In many communities the teaching of household arts has not passed that educational stage where its introduction into the school seems justifiable. The question is not wholly one of the possibilities of subject-matter. There is also a doubt, even in the minds of those who believe that the household industries should be taught to our boys and girls, as to whether the school is the place for such instruction. Housework may be an excellent method for training children in responsibility, and yet be entirely out of place in the school curriculum. Unless it is true that this work contributes distinctly to the training of the child, and that it has its full value only when taught in connection with other studies, and with groups of children, we can hardly claim room for it in a course of study which already has so many contestants for place. That the household arts do fulfil these conditions as subjects for study seems to me true. In common with manual training and laboratory work in general, the household industries are valuable as a means of giving the child control of material—power over things. This means accuracy, skill in manipulation, muscular control; and, more than this, it means the development of a sense of power in the child, that will do much toward making him efficient in after-life.

Another important reason for instruction in household arts and science is the fact that these often furnish the motive for other work of a more formal character, and through this motive vitalize these subjects and add greatly to their value. Number-work done because of the need of solving a particular problem in order that interesting work may be completed, gains a meaning that it never had before. History and geography not only aid in the

right understanding of hand-work, but receive direct contributions from it. Many problems in science are suggested by the need of an explanation for phenomena observed, or are presented for solution in order that some process may be rightly carried on; and both textiles and the study of food furnish a large number of such problems, and give opportunity for various applications which make scientific theories and principles a part of the student's working equipment. Not only may a very direct relation be maintained between the study of food in its various phases and the observation of seasonal changes, of the growth of plants, and of their relation to animal life, that constitutes much of the material of nature-study; but this relation is so real, so natural, and so mutually helpful that it is difficult to understand why it is so often neglected.

These advantages the household arts share with several other subjects, but one is pre-eminently its own. In nothing else, perhaps, is the social life of the school more directly maintained. Not only is it true that by means of this work children are brought into more social relations with one another, but it is not too much to hope for a larger social result. The interest in the life of the home, which sometimes seems to be in danger of disappearing from the lives of our children, is fostered by the study of the household industries, by the carrying on in school of processes so intimately connected with home life; and the center of social interest, which seems to have been transferred in these latter times from the home to other institutions, may again return to its normal position. If this might be so, it would tend, not to narrow our lives, but to broaden them; for the home must always remain the fundamental institution of society, and in it must be trained those who are to be efficient in promoting a larger social righteousness. This alone would justify the attention paid to this subject.

Nor, under modern conditions, are these objects attained so well by the simple sharing by the child in the work of the home as by direct instruction in the school. Right teaching should, indeed, increase, as it generally does, the desire of the child to take part in the processes going on in the home; and if this desire be encouraged, instead of discouraged by unwise parents, as it often is, the

value of the school instruction is greatly enhanced. The disadvantage of substituting home instruction for that of the school lies partially in the fact that the industries in the home are usually carried on in a very limited way, often under conditions that take no account of modern scientific methods, and in the majority of cases under the supervision of someone who could hardly realize the educational possibilities of the situation, or give time and thought to the solution of the problem, if she recognized it at all.

There is also a distinct gain from the social side, when the school offers this instruction. Not only does the work itself gain in interest when it is shared with others of the same age and experience; not only is the social life of the school itself enriched; but the very fact that household industries are thought worthy of a place in the school curriculum lifts them to a different plane in the child's estimation. This revaluation can hardly fail to have a definite reaction upon the home. Not only may the girls come to see that the work of the home is worthy of their best efforts, but the boys, both in the elementary and the high school, who have shared in the instruction, have shown in many cases a distinct change of attitude. To attain the best results, the work should not be confined to cooking and sewing, or even to the broader study of food and textiles. Even on the material side food and clothing represent individual life quite as much as that of the family. The problems of shelter must be added to complete the cycle.

The homes of other peoples both in primitive and modern times; the influence of modern discoveries and inventions upon our own homes; the problems of ventilation, heating, and lighting; of water supply and the disposal of household waste; the application of art to the furnishing and decoration of the house — all these phases of home life, and many more, furnish abundant material from which to select that best adapted to particular conditions. Problems of physics and of chemistry will frequently present themselves for solution; hand-work in art, and in wood-work will be found a necessity. There need be no attempt at an artificial correlation, for the correlation will be real and inevitable. Our home life, after all, on its material side is but the

application of arts and sciences to every-day life, and its failures come from the neglect to make this application.

The higher, more spiritual side of home life we may not be able to teach in the curriculum of the elementary school, but the insight into the possibilities of the material side may well lead the children to an interest in their homes, and a love for them, that shall contribute by and by to a spiritual ideal. There may be gradually developed in them a realization that the home is more than an aggregate of shelter, food, and clothing, and so another illustration be given of the great principle that the life is more than meat, and the body than raiment.

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